WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY · Founded December 17, 1857

APRIL 1980

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

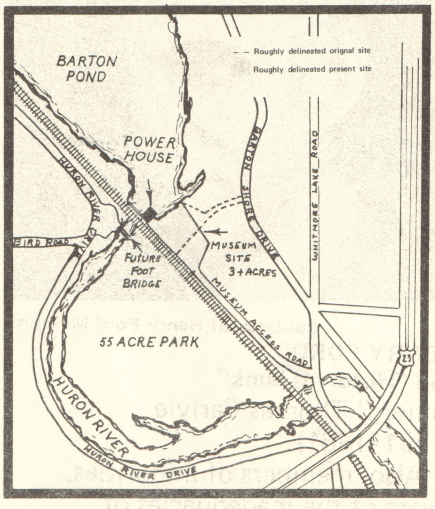
WCHS DEFERS BARTON POWERHOUSE PROJECT UNTIL STUDY, ANN ARBOR-BARTON ARRANGEMENTS FINAL

The WCHS Board of Directors has decided to defer construction and an active fund drive for a Barton Powerhouse museum until final arrangements have been concluded between the City of Ann Arbor and Barton Hills.

A verbally agreed on trade-off in land from Barton Hills will give a new approach along the railroad tracks and more usable space for on-site parking.

Ann Arbor City Council recently funded a study on reactivating hydro-power generation in a lower portion of the powerhouse. Generation could be a dramatic exhibit and a plus for the museum. The written land agreement awaits completion of the study.

The Society appreciates the cooperation of Barton Hills and the support of all who have made their second pledge payment as the fund continues to grow.



By Hazel Proctor

MUSEUM BUILDING SITE ANNUAL MEETING SET

The annual WCHS meeting with election of officers and directors will be held Thursday, May 22. Wystan Stevens will present a slide program.

HOME SHOW HELPERS THANKED; AUCTION RAISED $1,871; WHEN SPRING CLEANING, THINK OF NEXT AUCTION!

Thanks are due all the WCHS helpers at the Home Show. Meanwhile, auction proceeds rose to $1,871 as late bids have come in on remaining items.

Hazel Proctor, auction chairman, already has some things for next year and reminds readers to think of the auction when spring cleaning. A box of buttons brought $8, some odd cups and saucers, $8 each, a top hat, $17, old sheet music, $7, and some old newspapers, $38.50 (much older than last week's, of course).

Only a partial report was given last month as the show took place several days after press deadlines.

Mary Blaske designed the booth. Helping transport and set up were Tom Blaske, Wystan and Catherine Stevens, Bill and Beth Klinke and Jim Proffer who also built the backdrop. Special thanks to Workbench for loan of a van.

Ethelyn Morton was in charge of staffing the booth. Staffers were Mrs. William Austin, Dr. William Bender, Reeva Cranor, Dr. John Dann, Mrs. Glen Freeman, Mrs. A. A. Heald, Mr. and Mrs. Dan Lirones, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Miller, Mrs. Claire Palmer, and Herbert Pfabe.

Also Mr. and Mrs. Peter Rocco, Jane Southwell, Dan Swehla, Mr. and Mrs. Wystan Stevens, Mrs. Eugene Willits, Johanna Wiese, Lawrence Ziegler, and Girl Scouts Laura Shope, Sherri Givens, Nicole Merke, Denise Heinrich, Emily Clague, and Lisa Loomans of Troop 600 at Newport School, led by Mrs. Rosemary Clague.

Thanks also to Thomas Knight, auction clerk, and Great Lakes Federal Savings for loan of tables.

FIRST U-M PRESIDENT'S LIBRARY TO BE TOPIC AT BENTLEY LIBRARY

"A Frontier Library" from an Ohio attic will be the topic at the WCHS meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, April 24, at Bentley Library.

Suzanne Steele, librarian in charge of printed materials in the Michigan Historical Collections at Bentley Library, will discuss and show the library of the Reverend John Monteith, first president of the U-M in 1817.

Like so many New Yorkers of long ago, Mrs. Steele came west to Michigan from New York State. Born in Albany, she went to college at Wellesley and took her library degree from the U-M.

WCHS 1980 TOUR WILL VISIT JACKSON MUSEUM

The WCHS 1980 bus tour on Saturday, June 14, will visit the Ella Sharp Museum in Jackson.

The museum consists of the beautifully restored Greek Revival Merriam-Sharp house, dating from the mid-1800's, an original tower barn with early farm implements, an early woodworking shop, a log cabin, cross-roads store and one-room schoolhouse.

It is in Ella Sharp Park in southwest Jackson. More details next month. Mark your calendar now.

RESEARCH TAKES SPEAKER TO CASTLE IN FRANCE

Welton Chamberlain, a counselor-educator in the Pinckney Public Schools who last year found his own ancestral castle at the head of the Seine River in France will speak on "Castle-ing Your Ancestors" at the April Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County meeting.

It will be at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, April 27, at Washtenaw Community College. Beginner's class and help session, 1 p.m.

FOUNDER OF A LEADING U.S. MUSEUM FLUNKED HISTORY QUIZ, CALLED IT BUNK

"Actually what Henry Ford is quoted as saying by Charles N. Wheeler in an interview published May 25, 1916, in the *Chicago Tribune* is 'History is more or less bunk. It's tradition'," Professor Donald J. Proctor told the March WCHS audience.

Intending to use the quote merely as a facetious point of departure for a talk, he started to research "the why, when and particularly the consequences of Ford's assertion."

Before he finished he had a better opinion of Ford and a second major part of his talk which he called "History's Revenge: An Interval in the Life of Henry Ford, 1915-1919."

Professor Proctor, whose credits include a doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Southern California in history and education and a distinguished faculty award from U-M Dearborn where he teaches American history, agrees with Ford.

"A lot of history is bunk. To a large extent it depends on who writes it. Furthermore Henry Ford was in good company when he derided the discipline of history.

"Mr. Ford, despite being a man who had few intellectual peers in the engineering and automotive world, was woefully unfamiliar with the world of letters. Hence he was probably unaware that the history of history is festooned with quotes from the lips of learned notables that in essence support his assertion."

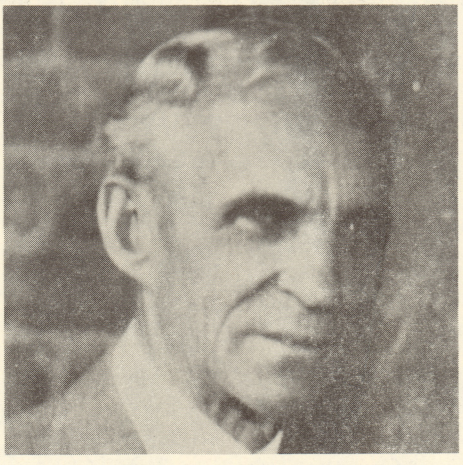
Sample quotes:

"On the breast of that huge Mississippi of falsehood called History, a foambell more or less of no consequence . . .," Heinrich Heine (1797-1856).

"How oft we sigh/When histories charm, to think/That histories lie!" Thomas Moore (1780-1852).

"History is a lie agreed upon," Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821).

"History is a distillation of rumor," Thomas Carlyle (1791-1881).



Courtesy of Henry Ford Museum

HENRY FORD
said "History is bunk"

Also, members of minorities, aware of the inadequacies of history books, are not likely to "dismiss Henry Ford out of hand," he said.

Frances Fitzgerald in *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* says much the same thing as Ford, he said. (He passed out a summary of her book and outline of his talk. Miss Fitzgerald also wrote the prize-winning history of American involvement in Vietnam, *Fire in the Lake*.)

Professor Proctor then turned to Ford's life from 1915, "a convenient time to evaluate Ford at his vigorous best, to mid-May 1919 when he took the stand to testify in his libel suit against the *Chicago Tribune*."

Proctor called it "a period of paradox, a period when Ford's stubbornly held devotion to peace and his attachment to agrarian ideals in politics and society—noble ideals, but sustained not by a knowledge of history but by a gut feeling—would prompt him to become involved in world politics, but would also contribute to his later period of reclusiveness."

In early February, 1915, the Panama Pacific Exposition opened in San Francisco, commemorating the recent opening of the Panama Canal. The big hit of the show was Henry Ford's assembly line. "They moved a whole assembly line from the Highland Park plant right out to the Pacific and were producing about 17 cars a day there."

Ford, age 51, was "really at the top of his game. He had a very warm and paternal relationship with his employees—then numbering 18,000. It was the halcyon period in the company's labor relations.

"The company provided special services for workers, employment for the handicapped, profit-sharing plans. He was very much opposed to labor unions but in terms of enlightened management, Ford had it, including even a department of sociology.

"In 1915 there was little evidence of what those who knew him refer to as a mean streak. In 1915 he enjoyed a worldwide reputation. From Dearborn to Russia admirers sang his praises."

An Irish writer said, "When you study the Ford company you have before you a great state, perfect in every particular, the nearest that anything on the face of this earth has got to Utopia."

And Edgar Guest, with the $5 day in mind which Ford established the previous year, wrote, in part:

"Tis a happier world for his
living here ..."

"The sinking of the Lusitania May 7, 1915 with loss of American lives had a profound effect in the United States. And James Couzens, the financial genius behind the Ford empire, a native of Canada, was very pro-England. He was shocked at Henry Ford's response to the sinking.

"Henry Ford said those people on board knew they were going into the war zone. The Germans had advertised that fact in seven New York daily newspapers.

"Henry Ford was an outspoken pacifist at a time when the majority

of the nation was going absolutely livid with indignation. Ford said he would rather burn down his plants than make war materiel. This precipitated the break between him and Couzens.

What led to his pacifism? Ford's family, if not pacifist, had shown a lack of enthusiasm for the military. Ford was greatly influenced by the McGuffey Readers. They were strongly pacifist—the fourth reader in particular projected soldiers as murderers. Also the early 1900's were a period devoted to peace.

Then the Peace Ship incident had an impact on Ford. After the Lusitania sinking, Rosika Schwimmer, a European peace and women's rights activist came to Ford with an American who had worked with President Wilson's staff, and said peace would be forthcoming if they could just get over there and organize continuous mediation.

"Henry Ford really gets involved. He agreed to hire a boat. He first made inquiries using the name Mr. Henry. The steamship lines refused to deal with him until they heard the last name was 'Ford,' then offered him his pick. He chose a Scandinavian lines ship, Oscar II in November and insisted they be over there by Christmas.

"It was too rushed. A lot of responsible individuals like Jane Addams and Edison who would have been willing to go disassociated themselves. The press was less than sympathetic. Ford got soaking wet on board, became ill and returned to the U.S. Failure of the mission was a crushing defeat for Ford and contributed much to his disillusionment.

"Next is the Chicago Tribune interview. Ford kept saying peace is the way. The reporter asked, 'What about Napoleon? What if the English hadn't been prepared, if they hadn't been able to defeat the Napoleonic fleet? Napoleon could have just waltzed into England.' That's when Ford said 'history is more or less bunk.'

"As we noted, a lot of people say that. But given the heat of the

Courtesy of U-M Dearborn

HISTORIAN PROCTOR
agrees, it sometimes is.

time, the Lusitania sinking and the mind of Colonel McCormick—they really latched onto that.

"Next Woodrow Wilson calls up National Guard troops because of our troubles in Mexico. A *Chicago Tribune* stringer in Detroit asks Ford Motor Company if employees who get activated will get their jobs back when they return. The fellow who answered the telephone, Frank Klingensmith, who succeeded Couzens said, "No. When they're gone, they're gone."

"He was wrong. The 18 or so who went got their jobs back. But the *Chicago Tribune*, without checking a second source, ran the story. On June 22 the *Tribune* ran an editorial referring to 'flivver patriotism' and condemning Henry Ford as an 'ignorant idealist' and 'anarchist.' Ford sued for libel."

The case did not come to trial until May 12, 1919. Meanwhile, Woodrow Wilson came to Detroit July 12, 1916, running for president on the slogan, "He kept us out of war" and received a fantastic reception at the Ford Highland Park plant.

Ford worked for re-election of Wilson even though earlier shocked pacifists put Ford on presidential primary ballots after Wilson said "we've got to get prepared."

Ford would not give any money to the campaign committee but said he would pay for advertising where he thought it would do the most good. He spent about $55,000-$58,000 in California which was so pivotal that the Republican candidate, Charles Evans Hughes, went to bed thinking he had won.

When a reporter called Hughes next morning after the California vote came in, Hughes' son said the President was sleeping. The reporter said, "When he wakes up, tell him he's not the president."

Wilson endorsed Ford for Senate in 1918 and the party nominated him "even though he is not one of us." Ford nearly won even though he did not campaign and his opponent, Truman H. Newberry, former Secretary of the Navy, spent $176,518. It was a tough, dirty campaign.

Newberry was sentenced to a couple of years in jail for excessive campaign expenditures but went free and served in the Senate after the Supreme Court ruled Congress did not have the right to regulate elections—it was a state function.

"The Ford lawsuit was moved to Mt. Clemens—way up in the sticks at the time. Ford would spend eight agonizing days on the stand. This guy who said 'history is bunk' at the time he was on the stand was building Ford Museum, the Ford archives, the Ford Institute of Technology. The irony of this—the man was investing so much in the perpetuation of history.

"It was a disaster. He didn't know anything about American history and they banged away at that.

"Who's Benedict Arnold?"

Ford: "I don't know, I think he's a writer." (He had a guy named Arnold who wrote technical things for him.)

"They said, what about the War of 1812? He didn't know there was a War of 1812. His lawyers tried unsuccessfully to give him a crash course in American history.

"It's funny, but it's tragic. The press really got down on him"

The Nation sadly reported that "the veils of glamour which had gathered about the miracle-

working industrialist had in a great part been torn away. . . We would rather have had the curtain drawn, the popular ideal unshattered."

"Henry Ford was crushed. He became far more reclusive. Ford like the country grew cynical. It brought out the worst in him.

"Later scholars decided Germany did not start the war, it was divided guilt. The Kellogg-Briand peace pact said we must repudiate war. The things Ford had been saying had been enacted by the late 1920's, but it was too late for Ford.

"Poor Henry, it did him in, and I think we're all the worse for it."

ARGUS CAMERA, VIEWER, MAYOR'S COAT GIVEN WCHS

Wystan Stevens, Ann Arbor historian, recently presented three comparatively recent artifacts with significance in local history to the Society.

They were an Argus Super 75 Camera complete with leather case, an Argus slide previewer, both made in Ann Arbor, and a dinner jacket apparently belonging to William E. Brown, Jr., mayor of Ann Arbor from 1947-55, who started and developed the local parking structure system.

They were found at local garage or rummage sales by Wystan and his wife and the coat by a friend, Mary Grace Evans, formerly of Ann Arbor.

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WCHS BOARD OPPOSES KEMPF HOUSE CHANGES

The WCHS Board of Directors at the April meeting went on record as unanimously supporting preservation of Kempf house without structural alteration except those which would restore it to its original condition.

WCHS which helped get it designated as an historic site has some of its artifacts on exhibit there. The house is on the National Register of Historic Places but that status precludes only exterior changes. Interior changes have recently been proposed.

OPEN HOUSE TO FEATURE DOLLS, DANCERS MAY 4

Cobblestone Farm's public spring open house will be from 12 noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, May 4, at the farm, 2781 Packard Rd.

Margaret Smith will show antique dolls and miniature scenes. The Cobblestone Dancers will perform. The Herb Study Group of the U-M Botanical Gardens plan to start a Victorian garden around the front-yard fountain. Construction of the granary may also be started by then.

HOUSE TOUR PLANNED

Dexter Historical Society will sponsor a walking house tour Friday, May 16, featuring five houses and the museum. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and 6-10 p.m. For ticket information call Rose VanAken at 426-4958. Luncheon at St. Andrew's Church by reservation.

DR. DANN A CELEBRITY WITH HIS NEW BOOK

Dr. John C. Dann's book, *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of The War For Independence*, to be published this spring by the University of Chicago Press will be a Book-of-the-Month Club bonus choice and a history book club choice, he has learned.

Dr. Dann, director of the U-M's Clements Library and WCHS vice-president, previewed his book at the September WCHS meeting. An excerpt was to appear in this month's American Heritage magazine. The New York Times reviewed it Friday, March 28.

SALEM ELECTS LYKE

Ronald Lyke has been elected president of the Salem Historical Society. Elsie Manson will serve as vice-president; Irene Lyke, secretary; and Richard Formella, treasurer.

DOWNTOWN WALKING TOURS SCHEDULED MAY 11, 17

Historic buildings of the downtown Ann Arbor area will be featured on Preservation Week walking tours May 11 and 17, Louisa Pieper of the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission announced.

The guided 2-2½ hour tours will leave Kempf House at 1 p.m. The 50 cent per person fee includes a map and refreshments. The route will go down Liberty to Main, out Liberty to the former Oddfellows Hall, recently purchased by Moveable Feast, and back via First and Washington Streets.

WASHTENAW COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MEETING

8:00 p.m. THURSDAY
APRIL 24, 1980

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